DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 064 602 AC 012 694

AUTHOR	Jones, Bob; Lovett, Tom
TITLE	Living Today: BBC Local Radio Education.
INSTITUTION	British Broadcasting Corp., London (England).; Workers Educational Association, London (England).
PUB DATE	[71]
NOTE	36p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; *Adult Education Programs; Blue Collar Occupations; *Disadvantaged Groups; *Educational Radio; Interagency Coordination; Lower Class; Programing (Broadcast); *Radio; Sociology
IDENTIFIERS	Liverpool England; Workers Educational Association

ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the setting, conduct and results of an action research project in which the Workers' Educational Association and the BBC local radio station in Liverpool jointly prepared an educational radio series for working class adults. In February 1971, six programs were broadcast under the series title "Living Today." Each program dealt with a topic relevant to the target audience. The general theme was to examine the influence which particular institutions have on people's lives and behavior, and the effect on the individual, group and community when these institutions lose power and influence in a rapidly changing society. The objectives for the series were: extension of vocabulary; critical awareness; use of concepts; and action. The project represented a new approach to neglected areas of adult education, using local radio as a vital instrument of contact between educationists and those whose needs are overwhelming and almost totally unsatisfied. (CL)

B

on

LIVING TODAY

BBC LOCAL RADIO EDUCATION

Living Today

This booklet describes a venture
undertaken jointly by BBC Radio Merseyside
and the West Lancashire and Cheshire
Branch of the W.E.A.

Introduction

BBC Local Radio only dates back to 1967 when the first station opened. For many years prior to the opening, the BBC had given planned attention to local radio as a desirable future form of sound broadcasting. The experiment, defined by the Government, was to test the practical validity of the BBC Local Radio concept of partnership in broadcasting. It was to determine whether the new stations would develop as diluted attenuated copies of national and regional sound broadcasting or whether they would grow robustly reflecting the strengths and characters of their individual localities by offering an accessible means of communication to their constituents.

Local Councils were invited to join in the experiment by contributing financially to the costs of station operation during the test period and, at their invitation, the BBC established eight stations in Leicester, Sheffield, Merseyside, Nottingham, Brighton, Stoke, Leeds and Durham.

In August 1969 the Postmaster-General (now the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications) declared the experiment successfully concluded and authorised the BBC – at its own cost entirely – both to continue its existing operation and to extend its scope by opening a further twelve stations. All these additional stations are now in full operation from their studios in Bristol, Manchester, London, Oxford, Birmingham, Chatham, Southampton, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Blackburn, Hull and Derby.

There is an Education Producer on the sta.. of each station and, from the start, education has been an important feature of local broadcasting. The Producer's basic task is to determine with local advice and co-operation those needs which can be helped by local radio working in consort with local educationists. In view of this, the educational outputs of the stations show marked differences of character and emphasis. Different mixtures of programmes for schools and for adults are found. Within the adult sphere of operation, it sometimes happens that a station's main work is with the WEA while its neighbour enjoys a close relationship with the University's Extra-Mural Department. A third station may have

strong connections with the LEA's Adult Education Department and yet a fourth may be in active association with all three of the main providers.

On BBC Radio Merseyside, there has been an active response from both schools and adult educationists and so the output of educational programmes has ranged widely across the spectrum of educational activity in the area. This has enabled the station from a solid base of educational commitment to prospect outwards into areas of educational potential not yet fully developed.

This booklet describes the setting, conduct and results of one instance of an educational body combining skills and resources with those of a BBC Local Radio station. It has been written jointly by Bob Jones, the Education Producer at BBC Radio Merseyside, and Tom Lovett, Adult Education Officer (WEA) to 'Priority' – the Centre for Urban Community Education. The situation described is one in which enthusiasm, effort and specialist skills have come equally from the two parties (in this case, the WEA and BBC Radio Merseyside) and yet one in which each separate set of facilities brought into the common pool has required the presence of a complementary set for the achievement of the common aim – the creation of an educational enterprise. It is not simply the close co-operation nor the unity of purpose which distinguishes this joint venture but the thoughtful realism of approach to educational communication which has throughout been the constant target.

Hal Bethell,
Local Radio
Education Organiser

4

CHAPTER I

The Background

At the end of our experimental days, the Government's approval of local radio was seen by those working in the medium as an endorsement of the values of our operation in a social sense. The thinking which gave rise to local radio, and which continues to govern its efforts, lay directly in line with the awareness so marked in the late fifties and sixties of the importance of community development to the health of society.

Perhaps nowhere in society has this need been so acutely felt as in the run-down areas of industrial cities caught in the cross-currents of stress and instability swept in by social change. In such areas the work of Community Centres and Community Development Officers has been invaluable in helping residents to retain an identity and a community spirit.

The Plowden Report recommended the establishment of Educational Priority Areas in deprived urban localities. In the Liverpool E.P.A. a great deal of work has been done under the direction of Dr Eric Midwinter to make the school a more effective instrument of community life. This has been done by strengthening the links between schools and the children's parents and by drawing the parents into a closer engagement with the education of their children. Although the E.P.A. Project as such has now ceased, it is encouraging that a new organisation has been formed to carry the work forward. 'Priority', a National Centre for Urban Community Education, is financed by such bodies as the Liverpool Education Committee, the W.E.A., the Advisory Centre for Education and the John Moores Trust.

Against this background in Liverpool, it was felt that BBC Radio Merseyside – particularly through its Education Department – had an important contribution to make. It was this shared feeling that brought the radio station into a close working with the W.E.A. on an adult education project. That the need was, and continues to be, great has recently been underlined by Lady Plowden's words in which she describes E.P.A. parents as 'frightened, angry, bewildered and bored. They move in, to them, uncharted seas of

officialdom . . . buffeted by forces completely outside their control . . . which tell them only too often why something they want is not possible – all this emphasises to them their failure.'

Some years ago, the Liverpool W.E.A. attempted to launch a course for adults in a densely populated down-town area of the City using as a centre a school in a well-established district of the community. The course was well-publicised. No one from the target area turned up. Those who did attend came from middle-class areas and were attracted by the sound of the course which had been planned as an inter-disciplinary scheme associated with the theme 'Conflict'. It may be that failure could be put down to ineffective publicity too intellectual in appeal. The tutors felt, however, that had students from the working class come along they would have found the course both challenging and interesting.

This experience underlined a twofold problem: how to make the contents of a course attractive and how to persuade those whose attention and interest was sought to break the habits of a lifetime and voluntarily associate themselves with an educational scheme. No amount of knocking on doors, no amount of distributing pamphlets had saved the 'Conflict' scheme from failure. Other things apart, publicity was ineffective because the tutor had available no way of engaging the minds of potential students for long enough to convince them of the worth of such a course in personal terms. Local radio could now put adult education schemes on offer to people in their own homes and so much the better if programmes could be made specifically for groups with common problems but no working system of problem-sharing and problem-solving.

Much thought was given to the possibility of using this medium in the attempt to reach a new educational audience. It was seen that the producer would have to devise his programmes extremely carefully and that the exercise would have to be so organised that the results could be in some way evaluated. No special funds were available for this purpose either from the BBC or from the W.E.A. and therefore stringent economy overlay the entire scheme. Happily, the W.E.A. and BBC Radio Merseyside, faced with a common problem and sharing a similar view of its nature and its imperatives, came together in a co-operative scheme in which the W.E.A. undertook the organisation of a novel venture and BBC Radio Merseyside undertook the production of the radio programmes which were to form an integral part of the scheme.

In February 1971 six programmes were broadcast under the series title *Living Today*. Each programme dealt with a topic relevant to the target audience. No runaway success is claimed for the series or for the experiment to which it contributed. What is claimed, though, is that the joint endeavours exposed many problems which in themselves are capable of solution and also pointed the way to a fruitful and, so far, unique line of development in adult education. These first lessons indicate a new approach to neglected areas of adult education using local radio as a vital instrument of contact between educationists and those whose needs are overwhelming and are almost totally unsatisfied.

CHAPTER II

The problem of adult education in educational priority areas

The Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project was one of five set up throughout the country in 1968 to explore ways and means of tackling the educational problems of deprived communities. It was the only project with a team member specially responsible for the development of adult education in working-class communities.

The team member concerned was in fact a Tutor Organiser from the West Lancashire and Cheshire District of the Workers' Educational Association, seconded to the project in September 1969, after it had been in operation for one year. The W.E.A. had for many years been acutely conscious of the need to involve itself in the vast and seemingly intractable problem of adult education for the unskilled and semi-skilled working class. In Liverpool the W.E.A. District Secretary took one of the first practical steps in such involvement with the E.P.A. appointment.

A number of recent educational reports, Crowther, Newsom, Plowden, had all emphasised the disadvantage under which working-class children laboured in the schools they attended and the fact that notwithstanding the 1944 Education Act their opportunities for higher education were severely limited. Such reports also underlined the importance of parental support and the fact that working-class parents lacked the necessary skills and knowledge to assist their children. The picture painted was one in which a very sizeable minority of the population suffered under grave educational, social and economic disadvantages.

It was this section of the population that the W.E.A. – and other bodies responsible for further and adult education – had singularly failed to attract to its classes. A number of reasons were advanced for the unwillingness of the working class to take advantage of a second educational opportunity. For the more pessimistic the reason was simply sheer apathy. However, this naïve view was soon discarded when more information became available from the

Reports referred to above and from research findings indicating that:

(*a*) The educational experience of many working-class adults had not been a happy or constructive one.

(*b*) The education they did receive was often totally irrelevant and many left school lacking the elementary skills common to more affluent sections of the community.

(*c*) The school itself was a middle-class institution emphasising middle-class values and decrying or ignoring working-class cultural values.

Thus the reluctance of working-class adults to involve themselves in adult education could be seen, in some measure, to be a direct result of past educational experience. In addition, the W.E.A. and other educational organisations had, like the schools, a middle-class image, offered subjects which had no meaning or relevance for such adults, and held their classes or courses in typically middle-class surroundings.

It was clear that many of the problems facing residents in the Liverpool E.P.A. were of a very practical nature such as bad housing, lack of play facilities for children, the breakdown of established communities and of the traditional ways of life. The W.E.A. Tutor Organiser decided that it was essential that any adult educational 'service' he had to offer in these circumstances should deal with real problems, in a language that was common to the communities he was concerned with and in surroundings in which they felt at ease. This approach did not prove easy to put into practice during the first year of operation.

Against this setting, the tutor became involved in a variety of community exercises, e.g. helping residents set up a community centre; running a summer play scheme; assisting the residents in the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project with their housing problems; offering advice and information to a number of residents' associations, tenants' groups and community councils. In this way, he gained detailed insight of the problems facing local residents. He also established contact with a wide range of working-class groups of a formal and informal nature as well as with a number of voluntary and professional organisations involved in various aspects of community development.

Having established a rapport with such groups he then decided to try something slightly more formal than the 'learning through

doing' exercises of the initial year. A list of 'Talking Points for Adults' was drawn up based on the sort of topics which seemed to reflect the cares of the area, i.e. 'The Family'; 'Children and their Education'; 'Your Rights'; 'Health and Safety in the Home'; 'Damn Politicians', etc.

These topics were publicised attractively on W.E.A. paper but even so they failed to stimulate any response. At an E.P.A. exhibition of school work in a large department store, frequented by many residents in the E.P.A., an adult education stall was set up and over 8000 of these leaflets distributed. The response was negligible.

However, when the tutor asked a number of groups whether or not they would be interested in meeting regularly to discuss such topics as divorce, abortion, drug addicts, permissive society, etc., they responded very enthusiastically and a number of discussion groups were set up in schools, pubs, church halls, community centres and private homes. Arrangements were made for a dozen part-time tutors to lead these informal discussions.

In spite of the inherent interest of the topics chosen by the groups, it soon became clear that many of the tutors lacked the necessary skills to develop this educational opportunity. They lacked the intimate awareness of the problems, background and culture of the adults concerned and found it difficult to translate concepts into relevant analogies. A focus for discussion was needed which people could easily accept and which would stimulate and encourage a rapport between, and among, the group and the tutor. Such a focus would act as a tool for the tutor in the same way that books and lectures are educational tools in a formal middle-class educational setting, but conditions required that here it should be based on the language, culture and problems of local people. This would appear to be, in fact, the crux of the whole problem facing adult educationists attempting to work with working-class communities. Generally speaking the great majority of tutors employed by the W.E.A. and other responsible bodies are specialists in one or more academic disciplines. Their training and academic background reflects the emphasis on the breakdown of knowledge into watertight compartments. Their particular professional skills are normally expressed in their ability to encourage some understanding of these disciplines amongst adults with a largely non-academic background.

However, despite the lack of academic background the typical

student usually *recognises* the relevance of the academic approach to learning. He shares with his tutor a commonly accepted intellectual heritage which values the exercise of cognitive skills. Tutor and student tend to speak the same language code. The tutor responds to a need or request for adult education which fits into a generally accepted cultural pattern.

In working-class communities, however, there is usually no such shared intellectural heritage between student and tutor. Cognitive skills are at a premium. Academic disciplines are seen as divorced from the realities of life and as having no meaning. The emphasis is on the affective, the shared experience, the here-and-now. The formulation of ideas unrelated to specific and concrete realities is difficult for most adults in such communities. Their language – often rich, colourful and perceptive – depicts this concern for the immediate, the shared experience, the emotional response.

In such a situation adult Educationists need an entirely different approach. They need to construct 'learning situations' where people will discuss problems *they* feel are important whilst the tutor, instead of providing answers, helps the group work slowly towards increased awareness of the various complex factors involved in many everyday problems and thus, it is hoped, point the way to some solutions. This is difficult in working-class communities because so many attitudes and opinions are tied up in emotions, symbols, songs and other cultural artefacts. If an educationist can key into this vitally important but largely non-analytical communications network then he can awaken a response that is deeply embedded in the culture and personality of many working-class adults.

For these reasons, the tutor organiser's thoughts turned increasingly towards the mass media. Cinema, TV, radio and the popular press are very much part of working-class culture. Interest and involvement in the mass media is not confined to the working class but in no other class is it so important an element of the total cultural framework. Educationists are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the mass media as educational aids although their use of them is often in traditional middle-class cultural terms with an emphasis on discussion and exposition.

The tutor organiser decided that in his local situation, local radio was an ideal educational medium. A radio was an easy educational 'tool' for tutors to carry with them into the various informal

venues around which adult education was developing. Tapes could be produced and used if a group could not meet on the night of the programme or if they wished to listen to a repeat. Local radio also offered the possibility of a communications facility for residents in deprived communities to voice their cares and problems publicly.

For all these reasons the tutor organiser decided to approach Radio Merseyside's Education Producer, Bob Jones, with a plan for producing a series of educational programmes specifically designed for residents in the Liverpool Educational Priority Area. BBC Radio Merseyside responded very enthusiastically and it was decided to produce a series of programmes called *Living Today* which would be written by the tutor organiser and produced by the Education Producer.

12

CHAPTER III

Living Today: *a local radio series for E.P.A. residents – aims and contents*

Initially the title for the series was *You and Authority* but this was dropped because it sounded too forbidding and academic. The general theme, however, remained unaltered and this was to examine the influence which particular institutions have on people's lives and behaviour and the effect on the individual, group and community when these institutions lose power and influence in a rapidly changing society. Thus the programmes were designed as a sort of layman's sociology. Such programmes are not new either on TV and radio but it was quite new for them to be produced with a working-class audience in mind and local radio offered an opportunity to translate concepts into terms ordinary working people could understand.

W.E.A. work in the Liverpool Educational Priority Area had shown that notwithstanding the particular problems facing the various communities in the E.P.A. all shared certain general concerns. These general problems arose from the breakdown of established community life. The family was no longer the strong unit it had been in the past. The neighbourhood – as many understood it – with its system of social norms and controls had almost disappeared. The Church, in an increasingly permissive society, no longer exercised any great authority in moral matters. The school was no longer part of the community and new teaching methods had created a gulf between school and home. The local authority was increasing its power to shape people's lives whilst the government itself was also greatly influencing the pattern of community life, but to most people was completely remote and detached from their everyday problems.

For some middle-class communities – although by no means for all – this decrease in the influence of certain established institutions has opened up new areas of personal freedom. However, for many of the working class – especially those in Educational Priority Areas – it has only contributed to a general air of confusion and isolation.

A series of problems has arisen from these changes. These are problems that working-class communities are meeting for the first time, yet without the educational training and background of other, more educated, communities. Institutions like the family, neighbourhood, school and church had created a network of rewards and restraints on individual and group behaviour and had built up a sense of community concern and awareness. Much of this social framework is disintegrating or has already broken down in E.P.As for a variety of reasons. The local authority and government – acting through various social agencies – are attempting to fill the gaps that have been left in society.

However, for the communities concerned – if one can still call them communities – the result has been devastating. Problems of control and responsibility once within the province of the family, neighbourhood, school and church, have fallen on the shoulders of the individual citizen and very few have received an education adequate to the demands now being made on them.

The radio series was designed to explore all these problems in a Liverpool context in the hope that such an examination might enable people in the E.P.A. to understand the complexity of their origin and that the understanding subsequently gained might point the way to solutions. That this was a tremendous task to undertake in an area where the adult population had received little or no benefit from its formal education was recognised from the beginning. It was decided therefore to set a range of objectives for the series:

Low Level

Extension of Vocabulary

Getting people used to the idea of discussion and becoming more confident in discussion. Listening to another's point of view. Accepting the tutor's role in such a discussion, i.e. attempting to link various views and comments.

Middle Level

Critical Awareness

Becoming more aware of the possibility of other points of view; of 'facts' being introduced into a discussion; of the complexity of many social problems in terms of the various factors responsible. Accepting the causal nature of many factors in creating a problem.

High Level

Use of concepts

Becoming conscious of the link between the various programmes in terms of the concept under scrutiny, i.e. authority, its influence on individual and group behaviour and its changing role in our society.

Action

Practical action arising out of increased understanding.

Each of these objectives was important in its own right for it was realised that in a series of six programmes it would be unrealistic to expect a progression through the range of objectives. For some of the adult groups, vocabulary was not a problem. For others, vocabulary limitation was the major obstacle. If this could be overcome then a great step forward would have been made in solving the linguistic problem that Bernstein and other sociologists see as a major difficulty facing working-class communities in their attempt to combat bureaucracy and compete on equal terms for the various resources – social, educational and economic – of our society.

The programmes themselves were designed to last fifteen minutes, and to sustain interest by their emphasis on variety and entertainment. Thus, use was made of drama, popular songs and interviews with local residents. Drama was included on some occasions to compare a scene from the past with comments from residents facing similar problems today or to recreate an everyday problem which people would recognise and wish to express views on. The songs were seen as a means of giving vicarious expression to hopes, desires, memories about the problem under examination. Residents' comments were included because the strength of their oral expression gave a sharp authenticity which, we hoped, adults in the E.P.A. would recognise and respond to with comments of their own. The idea was to create a 'montage' which would stimulate and encourage discussion by establishing a sympathetic bond between the programmes' contents and the listeners' own experience.

Earlier programmes in this vein have usually had a middle-class educational setting with all that implies in terms of culture and understanding. Our series was an attempt to utilise popular and working-class culture, to awaken response and awareness in the firm belief that this approach held a key which educationists, with

certain notable exceptions, have failed to grasp fully in their attempts to meet the problem of education for working-class communities.

The series was thus seen as an innovation with its character of a 'structured' educational exercise for working-class communities. The programmes offered the opportunity to pursue a number of educational objectives within an informal structure. They brought together a wide variety of problems commonly met and discussed by residents in the area and offered the possibility of a deeper understanding. It was therefore a logical progression from the very informal discussions which had been organised in the E.P.A. during the first year of the W.E.A. project.

Finally the series differed in a number of fundamental respects from other adult educational courses utilising local radio:

(i) It was aimed specifically at the most educationally deprived section of the community.

(ii) It made wide use of the culture of such communities as an educational method and technique in its own right rather than following traditional adult education techniques.

(iii) The programmes were not to be broadcast in the exclusive hope that residents in the E.P.A. would listen independently. Rather the aim was to arrange for various groups of residents to listen to the series with a W.E.A. tutor. Such an arrangement was something new, not only in terms of adult education for working-class communities but also when compared with earlier radio exercises in adult education on the local station.

(iv) Formal arrangements were to be made for 'feed-back' both from tutors and students to discover their reactions to each programme and to indicate – if possible – if any of the edu tional objectives, referred to earlier, were met.

CHAPTER IV

Producing the Living Today *series*

Before *Living Today* could be written and later produced it was important that everyone concerned should understand its aims and objectives clearly. First, it was essential to define and describe the audience in terms of interests and susceptibilities. The series was designed and directed at a known established group of the population among which pilot discussion groups had been pioneered by the W.E.A. Tutor Organiser attached to the Educational Priority Area Project in Liverpool. It was this group that made up the prime target audience. Other groups in other parts of Merseyside may well have found the programmes stimulating but in the first instance the organisers were concerned to see what success the programmes would have with families and parents, especially, living roughly within the bounds of our local Educational Priority Area – mainly the central Liverpool area with a population of approximately 100,000.

The series would be catering for the educational needs of a section of the community which had a certain background in common. The majority of the listeners would have left school at the earliest possible legal opportunity. Many of them would have unhappy experiences of their schooldays and would consequently not have had the motivation to attend conventional evening classes. Other factors would have militated against an interest in adult education. Economic stringency, shift work patterns and family commitments would have made attendance difficult. Those few who had attended conventional adult education classes would have needed more than the usual perseverance and stamina to see the course through because of the pressures of their everyday life. Moreover, the majority of the students at the usual adult education classes tend to be middle class with a favourable educational background, and this factor would have had two possible effects on the listeners we were hoping to reach. Firstly it would have created an overawing atmosphere in which our potential students would feel inadequate and, secondly, the lecturers would tend to adjust their approach to those in the class with some degree of academic training.

Thus, three important criteria emerged:

(*a*) *Living Today* should present subjects which would clearly relate to the lives of listeners. The chosen subjects (e.g. role of the family, neighbourhood, the Church, school) were relevant to the basic patterns of living of the audience and moved outwards from the family circle to less familiar areas. Concentrating therefore on the significance of programme content, it was hoped to engage and sustain an interest for long enough to establish a stimulus upon which the tutor would be able to build.

(*b*) Presentation was to be of paramount importance. Clearly the didactic approach was not suitable. Level of language was to be given close consideration, although the temptation to over-simplify the level of language to a patronising extent was to be avoided. Another danger to be avoided was that of making the narrator seem to speak with the voice of authority. He was to be used as little as possible. He was to allow the important points to be made by people whom the listeners would recognise as speaking with the authority of experience in their own social field. The directness of opinions spontaneously expressed would provide a stronger contact between speaker and listener than would be possible by other means.

(*c*) The third aspect of presentation was that strategically placed resting points were to be provided in the programmes. At these points the flow would be halted for a while so that listeners could absorb the points made. At these resting points, usually either folk or popular songs were to be introduced. Many popular songs are concerned with social problems and by selecting a snatch or a phrase of a song it was possible not only to use the music for relaxation but also to reinforce the points previously made.

The use of popular songs would be an important factor because of their importance in the culture of the target audience. In the event, for many people in the classes, these songs provided points of identification with the problems under consideration.

By stressing these three aspects, relevance of content, directness of presentation and the use of popular culture, it was hoped to provide a platform of interest upon which discussion might be built. Generally speaking this proved to be the case. It was significant that the moments when the thread of communication seemed most tenuous occurred when officials found difficulty in explaining their functions in language which could be clearly understood by

the layman. This we felt illustrated how very easily officialdom in spite of good intentions can become estranged from the very people it exists to serve. A great deal of editing was usually necessary to present the opinions of some of the officials effectively but even the most sensitive editing and production cannot entirely soften the deadening effect of official jargon and bureaucratic speech patterns.

The adoption of the technique of building programmes around people's comments meant a great deal of detailed editing and compilation which fully stretched the manpower resources of the studio. In retrospect this method of presentation proved preferable to the discussions or straightforward lectures which could have been used. These approaches would have been more suitable for students who were used to listening to expositions or accepting academically based forms of tuition.

Another demanding aspect of this type of production was that the people who took part were interviewed on location in schools and homes. People unused to the studio were helped in this way to express their ideas in a relaxed manner. The extra attention and effort was thought well spent because many of the listeners felt that the points of view naturally and easily expressed by people of their community helped to establish the integrity of the programmes and the relevance of their intent.

The production of *Living Today* has made it quite clear that if the interest of educationally underprivileged adults is to be engaged then everything must be done to develop techniques of presentation which will accurately match their needs. It is hoped that as we gain experience in this field the barriers which exclude a large proportion of the population from educational advantage will be further broken down.

Time will tell how successful this experiment and approach will be. Certain it is that conventional methods of teaching adults cannot claim great success with this substantial section of the population. Orthodox approaches have been proved inadequate. Conventional methods have been found wanting. Almost conventionally, a large section of the adult population have been left wanting!

19

CHAPTER V

Organisation of series. Students' and tutors' background

Organising any sort of adult-education exercise in working-class communities is a task beset with problems. In the Liverpool Educational Priority Area a year had been spent exploring, defining and eventually overcoming some of these difficulties. The skills required to define needs and then organise adult education in response to such circumstances are of a specialised nature and require further research and development. However, the E.P.A. experience prior to the setting-up of the radio series had pointed to the need for flexibility and a high degree of informality, with a deliberate attempt made to minimise the 'explicitly' educational nature of activities involving adults.

The radio series was a much more structured exercise with well-defined educational aims. Explicitly, they were meant to be easy to listen to and enjoyable for their own sake. Implicitly, they provided a wealth of material for 'organised' discussion. Such 'organised' discussions call for an ability on the part of the tutor concerned to manage the discussion without dominating or imposing personal viewpoints. He needs to become chairman rather than leader; to be one of the group, yet aware of a wider purpose and thus make the best use both of the radio material and of the comments of listeners.

What was required was an ability to organise informally! The programmes themselves were designed for this type of development. It was then necessary to bring the local residents together in this fashion and to equip the tutors for the opportunities presented.

So far as the residents were concerned, a number of informal discussion groups in pubs, schools, community centres, church halls and private homes had already been successfully set up. A 'selling' tour of all these groups was undertaken in an attempt to gain their support for the project. Interest was immediate. Most of the groups concerned were excited at the prospect of taking part

in an exercise specifically concerned with their lives and problems. They responded very enthusiastically to the idea of having a look at such things as the family, the neighbourhood, the school, especially when they heard of the sort of problems the programmes would deal with. Earlier experience in working with community groups and awareness of many of their common problems was of invaluable assistance at this stage of promotion. Many of the groups were brought into the actual making of the programmes by recording their comments on the problems to be dealt with in the series. Thus some groups contributed to the series and then took part as students, listening to the programmes and entering into the discussion with the tutor provided by the W.E.A.

In addition to the existing groups, it was decided to 'offer' the series in three extra centres – two pubs and a community centre. In the case of the pubs this was done with the full approval of the brewery concerned – Tetleys Ltd. All in all, eleven groups were to be involved meeting in the following venues:

Pubs	3 groups
Schools	1 group
Church Halls	1 group
Community and Youth Centres	4 groups
Private homes	2 groups

All three pubs were in the north end of the city. One was in Everton, in an area of high-rise development with all the associated social problems. The other two were in the famous Scotland Road area, where old neighbourhoods are now being torn apart to make way for the new tunnel approach road.

The school group was in the most socially deprived area of the city, with a high incidence of multiple deprivation – an area of multi-lets with a large coloured population. The parents, however, by their stoicism and good humour showed great strength in the face of their various deprivations.

The group meeting in the church hall lived in a very close-knit working-class community, probably typical of many in Liverpool before slum clearance. The area is scheduled for demolition in two or three years' time. The houses do need to be replaced, but unfortunately it will mean the loss of the strong local sense of community. This was reflected in the attitudes and personalities of the mothers in the group who tended to be more articulate and self-confident than those in other groups. A survey of adult educa-

21

tion needs carried out by the E.P.A. team in this district had shown a high degree of interest in various forms of further education thus emphasising:

(*a*) The differing nature of various working-class communities in central Liverpool and the fact that even in such so-called 'depressed' areas, deprivation is a relative term.

(*b*) The possibility that stable working-class communities may offer even more opportunities for adult education than deprived areas.

The groups meeting in youth and community centres were all in the E.P.A. with one exception – a community centre group on a new housing estate on the outskirts of Liverpool. Actually, it was a housing estate with all the problems of an E.P.A. but with hot and cold running water!

Finally, two groups met in private homes. One was on the outskirts of the E.P.A. in a more affluent working-class area. The other was a residents' association which met in the converted basement of the chairman's home in the docks area of Liverpool.

The degree of informality in structure and composition of the groups ran all the way from the total informality of the pub group to the more structured grouping of the residents' association and the mothers' club. However, our most structured group was probably extremely informal compared to the average Adult Education class. The groups represented a very good sample of the various informal groups to be found in Liverpool working-class communities. The great majority of the residents who agreed to participate in the series were unskilled and semi-skilled working class with no previous experience of adult education. Ages ranged from 25 to 45 with a small sample of older people. As in adult education generally, women predominated.

The tutors came from various backgrounds in education. They included a primary school teacher, two secondary school teachers, a lecturer in a College of Further Education, a Polytechnic lecturer, an unemployed graduate, an Adult Education Diploma student, a Research Officer and a Curriculum Development Project Director. All were keen to work in these communities. Most had some experience of adult education, but not with predominantly working-class students. Therefore, meetings were held involving the tutor/organiser, the part-time tutors and the BBC Radio Merseyside Education Producer. At these meetings the nature and

purpose of the series as well as the list of the graded objectives were fully explained to the tutors. The tapes of the first few programmes were played. Problems and difficulties were thrashed out. Arrangements were made to provide radios for the tutors and tapes and tape recorders for those groups not able to listen in on the night of the broadcasts. It was also decided to have two further meetings – one in the middle of the series, the other at the end – to discuss the tutors' and the students' reactions and to plan future activities. The stage was thus set for a unique experiment in adult education and local radio co-operation.

23

CHAPTER VI

Tutor and student reaction to the Living Today *series*

Tutor's Reports

While *Living Today* was being broadcast, group tutors were asked to record details of attendance and reaction to each programme. Tutors were asked to observe how far the series appeared to be meeting the objectives set for it. In addition the tutors met together during this period. At these meetings the procedure for recording reactions was fully explained and the tutors had an opportunity to discuss how the series was progressing both amongst themselves and with the producer of the programmes.

Low-Level Objectives

Reports from tutors indicated that the programmes sparked off plenty of discussion during which the group members drew largely on their own experience. In most cases the tutors agreed that these discussion sessions provoked talk of a high degree of articulateness. It seemed that the low-level objective had been generally achieved in all the groups. These reports from two tutors are typical:

(i) 'The discussion was well sustained. Although a number of people began by pining for the old days, they became increasingly aware of the advantages of a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere between parents and children.'

(ii) 'One significant fact that should be mentioned is that many of those who took part in the discussions had not had such an experience since leaving school.'

From the fuller reports of the tutors, two conclusions can be drawn:

(*a*) The series was sufficiently stimulating to hold and stimulate its audience.

(*b*) The low-level objective was attained.

Middle-Level Objectives

There was evidence in the tutors' reports that discussion developed

from the recounting of personal experience but in some groups some programmes did not change the members' views. This report was received following the programme on 'Local Authority' – 'produced a very heated discussion. They hated the Local Authority official. A lot of "anti-corpy" moans followed by good resolution to keep reminding themselves that if we join together we can do something about it. None of them had heard accurately of community councils. None ever visited a city councillor.'

It seems that this group found it difficult to appreciate both sides of the case. Understandably, they viewed the local authority as responsible for the bad living conditions they had to face day by day. From the tutor's remarks, they were unwilling to make any concessions to the local authority. In this case the middle-level objective had not been achieved. There was little evidence of critical awareness in recognising the weaknesses and the strengths of conflicting viewpoints.

This reaction came out in another report, this time from a residents' group. The group had been particularly active in its relationship with the local authority. The local authority formed the subject of the particular programme – 'Most controversial programme so far (connected possibly with the fact that the group concerned appeared in it). Incensed by officials' contribution. Programme structure reflects their own feeling of impotence.' The final remark presumably implies that the group members felt that the producer had distorted the facts. In fact, a great deal of care was taken to present a balanced view. This reaction therefore does indicate a failure to appreciate opposing views and an exclusive reliance on personal experience.

There is, however, also evidence showing that groups on occasion did show critical qualities. The residents' group just mentioned revealed critical capacity when discussing the role of the Church. As the tutor reported, 'There's a healthy individualism which refused to accept the Church's teaching on contraception as a problem.' It may well be that when topics close to their experience like the quality of the neighbourhood were under discussion they found it difficult to be objective whereas contrary arguments concerning a more remote subject like the Church, could be appreciated.

Further, reactions like this one to the programme on the family show a widening of horizons – 'Programme produced a well-focused discussion – mainly concerned to see what perceptible

progress had been made for the individual in family life over a generation. Individual responsibility felt to be more now.'

This comment from a discussion on the Church – 'The feeling was that the Church has in some way failed its people and contributed to the decline in social stability' – also shows a groping towards individual opinions and a flexibility of thought. Considering all the evidence obtained, it would be reasonable to claim that the middle objectives were achieved in some cases, but certainly not by any one group consistently on all occasions. When the topic of the programme was remote enough from personal and frequently embittered experience, objectivity was often attainable.

High-Level Objectives

It is difficult to say how far the members of the groups were encouraged by the programmes to conceptualise. It could be claimed of course that the ability to see associations between ideas comes with practice in expressing oneself in discussion. Several of the tutors commented that their groups were so unfamiliar with the subjects dealt with in the programmes that they lacked confidence to express ideas which might have ultimately led them towards the perception of concepts. The programme on local government, for example, brought reactions of which these reports are typical: 'This was the least interesting of the discussion. Most members of the group felt they did not know much about the subject and were not deeply interested.' Another comment from a different group reflects a similar lack of background knowledge, 'General depression after this. The interviews recorded were "boring", "off the point", "full of long words and jargon".'

This latter comment was interesting. The producer has already commented on the officials' difficulty in choosing appropriate language and thereby putting at risk the continued attention of his audience. It is interesting to see that his opinion was confirmed by the listeners. Unfortunately, the conceptual level of language is customarily burdened with jargon. This need not be the case. A serious attempt must be made to help listeners conceptualise without language being used as a barrier to understanding. If the expression of basic ideas is obscure then it should not be surprising if the progress towards high-level objectives is not achieved especially by people who had had few opportunities to try out emergent ideas in discussion.

Some general observations from Tutors

Each tutor was asked to judge the impact of the *Living Today* series on his group. These two comments speak for themselves:

(*a*) 'The group seemed to enjoy most of the broadcasts and discussion and I was emphatically told that they had found the meetings interesting and worthwhile. To some extent, of course, this may have been politeness on their part, and it will be interesting to see whether they ask for any similar discussions during next winter and spring.'

(*b*) 'In my opinion after a term's work with them these women represent a huge pool of scarcely-tapped ability, talent and resourcefulness. Their humour, candour, generosity and realism, is hard to describe. They are brave, resilient and independent-minded and monuments to the irrelevance of a formal education system in which they "failed" and were neglected. The tragedy of their educational "failure" in early life is that they have been left with a kind of humility which is ludicrous when measured against their manifest intelligence, strength and articulateness. They would keep referring (with, as I pointed out, quite uncharacteristic meekness) to "ordinary people" (meaning themselves and implying that such ordinary people could not expect to effect much in the way of change however much they desired it, even if they had sound practical ideas about how to do so. The radio series was an excellent means of challenging this feeling of inadequacy, directly or deviously, and I counted it a triumph to read on one completed questionnaire at the end of the series that one of the things learned had been that there is more to the ordinary person than meets the eye.'

Many felt that progress would be faster when the tutors became better known and confidence between them and their groups is greater. Their comments reflect this difficulty. 'The major difficulty, however, was caused by the suspicion with which the tutor was viewed in this situation.' This tutor held his class in a public house. He goes on, 'Morally, it is intolerable for a complete stranger to drop into a pub with the deliberate intention of getting regulars to discuss specific issues. If it were not for the basic generosity and courtesy of the regulars at this particular pub, then the whole enterprise might have been disastrous.' The point is taken further by a tutor who explained why his group did not talk of plans for positive action at the end of the series. 'Action could have been

posed more positively if there were greater confidence in me, but that would require contact for more than a couple of hours weekly to show I was in earnest and to overcome the hesitations about someone of my age and background. But if the role of the discussion leader is to be extended outwards the question must be raised: 'To what extent does the adult educationist involve himself in the practical activity of the people he works with. In short, can the professional ethic of remote involvement survive if there is conflict with another need, the need to maintain confidence between both parties?'

From all the comments the following points may be drawn:

(*a*) There is great potential in the people who attended these discussion groups.

(*b*) Generally speaking, the radio series was considered worthwhile. One important point was that the members of one group expressed satisfaction that a local radio station had broadcast a series especially for their needs.

(*c*) The response varied according to the content of the programme.

(*d*) A close relationship between tutor and class must be cultivated on a more permanent basis in future and not merely while the series is being broadcast.

Reaction of discussion group members

At the end of the series each group-member was asked to fill in a questionnaire. In reply to the question – 'Have you ever been in a discussion group of this kind since leaving school?' – approximately half stated that they had not.

The other half who had had experience of expressing views in public belonged to organised groups like residents' associations or church-based groups. No one had had experience of discussion at a conventional adult education class run by the Workers' Educational Association or the University Extra-mural Department.

Another question asked if it was a help to have somebody from outside the group to ask questions and guide the discussion. The general feeling was that the leader was necessary –

(*a*) to keep the discussion going;

(*b*) to extend the knowledge of the group where this was lacking;

(*c*) to help the inexperienced individual to express opinions in public;

(*d*) to act as chairman or, as one person put it, as 'an arbitrator and nuisance controller'.

The most revealing replies came in answer to the question, 'Do you think you have gained anything new from any of these programmes?' Most people felt the series had widened their horizons, and had encouraged them to appreciate other people's points of view. Two replies in particular are worth quoting because they reveal the problem underlying adult education of this nature.

The first reads, 'I have learnt to think twice before condemning the other person's point of view or belief. I have learnt to look further afield to entertain my children. There are more places and people to go to for help than I thought ever existed. I now know more of what goes on in Liverpool behind the scenes. There are lots of people who are spending their time just to help us. There is also more to the ordinary person than meets the eye.' Secondly – 'I feel I have learned a little more concerning the community and also seeing that I can play a part as an individual in this community while learning too that I have rights to which I didn't think I was entitled.'

No one would claim that all the objectives of *Living Today* were achieved. Some were, some were not, but clearest evidence supports the belief of those involved that work on this frontier of education should continue in its aim of developing untapped potential. 'There is more to the ordinary person than meets the eye.'

CHAPTER VII

Class breakdown and events arising out of programmes

The number of residents actually taking part fluctuated from programme to programme but, with a few exceptions, the groups listening to the series remained fairly stable.

Average attendance was approximately ten residents per group. Total average attendance for all six programmes was 105. The table below is a breakdown of attendance figures for all eleven groups A – K.

Group Attendance Figures

Programmes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total Attendance
Neighbourhood	9	4	6	10	19	8	10	7	16	4	6	99
Family	9	6	11	8	18	9	12	11	18	9	9	120
Church	12	4	5	8	10	8	8	13	12	10	6	96
School	12	4	8	11	14	9	10	10	20	17	6	121
Local Authority	12	4	9	9	7	9	10	8	17	3	6	94
Government	12	4	7	11	9	9	10	10	16	8	6	102
Average Attendance for all 6 Programmes	11	4	8	9	13	9	10	10	17	8	6	105

Various factors were responsible for the fluctuation in class numbers. For instance in the three pub groups (A, B and C) account has to be taken on the competition of Everton and Liverpool games on at least three occasions! On another – during the broadcast on 'The Neighbourhood' – the tutor taking the group in a pub (Group C) found his numbers diminished because the regulars had gone off to a darts match to raise some funds for a neighbour who had fallen on

hard times! Only in the pub where discussions had already taken place regularly before the radio series was the group a stable one (Group A). In the other two the composition of the group tended to change from week to week. This would seem to suggest that some time is required to build up a regular group if meetings are to be held in pubs. People need time to become acclimatised to such an unusual activity in their normal surroundings. This confirmed earlier experience of pub discussions. The Tutor Organiser's familiarity with the district, its problems and its local leaders helped greatly in establishing Group A and gaining the acceptance and support of the regulars.

Almost all the other groups were much more stable in composition and attendance. The programmes on 'The Family' and 'The School' were far and away the most popular. The large attendance for these two aspects of *Living Today* is in line with the findings of those who have explored the educational interests of working-class adults, and the evidence collected by the Liverpool E.P.A. Project illustrating the interest of working-class parents in their children's education.

A number of other interesting points are illustrated by the high attendance throughout the series in Groups E and I. Group E meet in a Youth and Community Centre and the high attendance was, in large measure, due to:

(*a*) the efforts of the E.P.A. team (referred to earlier) in carrying out a survey of adult educational needs in the area. The discussion group was one of a number organised after the survey.

(*b*) the efforts of local students and community leaders who kept reminding residents about the series and encouraging them to attend regularly.

Group I was a Residents' Association which meets regularly every week. They had taken part in other activities organised by the Tutor Organiser in co-operation with the Local Community Development Officer.

These groups illustrate two different approaches to organising adult education for working-class communities. (1) door-to-door surveys with assistance from volunteers then organising activities arising out of survey results; (2) close co-operation with existing working-class informal organisations and local community workers. Neither approach excludes others, and they are only two

amongst a number. However, the Liverpool experience suggests that they are locally the most successful.

A detailed breakdown of the attendance figures by sex, occupation and class is not possible. The deliberate attempt made to make the whole exercise as informal as possible meant that the class registers had to be kept in the background to be filled in by the tutor after the class. In some instances even this proved difficult because of the changing composition of the class. However, all of the tutors managed to keep a register of numbers and most succeeded in gaining names and addresses. From this information and previous surveys carried out by the E.P.A. Project it appears that the majority attending were women (80 per cent) from the unskilled and semi-skilled working class.

As a result of the series, a number of events took place, or are planned to take place. One group decided to have a closer look at education in their neighbourhood as a result of their interest in the 'School' programme. The tutor concerned organised a series of discussions with local school heads. The group then became involved for the first time in a summer play scheme, and one of their number became secretary of the local community council. They also agreed to begin a new series of discussions on 'The Family' to last eight or ten weeks. Another group decided to have a closer look at the family, while a residents' association is planning a course on 'Community Action', i.e., an exploration of the structure and activities of the various community groups in Liverpool. This will be rather like the short six-week course taken immediately after the series by some members of a pub group and a group from the local community council. Their interest had been aroused by the programme on the local authority, and they spent six profitable meetings looking at the structure and role of the community council and its relationship with the local authority. If the success of this experiment in working-class adult education is assessed in terms of practical action and increased interest in adult education, then this, and the other examples quoted above, vindicated the hope, time and effort put into the series.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

In an article on the value of local radio in the *Guardian* (8 April 1971) Keith Dewhurst argued that the idea 'that people would be able to participate through local radio where they cannot in the ballot box is a romantic illusion'. This account of the Liverpool E.P.A. experiment contributes evidence that the idea of a community participation is not illusory but is very much a practical proposition.

Dewhurst went on to assert, however, that 'when the community talks most vitally to itself it discusses not facts but values, and values are most effectively defined and analysed in plays and lectures and documentaries which present a point of view'. This is exactly what the *Living Today* series set out to do, not in terms of a conventional play, lecture or documentary, however, but presenting this 'point of view' through the comments and the culture of the people themselves. The use of the still strong oral tradition in the material meant that the people were, in a sense, responsible for creating their own educational programmes. Thus they participated in a real sense, using the medium of local radio as a vehicle for expressing their viewpoints, and as an educational aid in discussing those viewpoints, in an attempt to deepen understanding and provide an effective basis for action. Increasingly the value of recording the voice of 'the people', of maintaining the oral traditions, stimulating its survival and growth, is recognised as an important and valuable contribution to the recording of social change. History can be recorded and written, not just from an élitist point of view but also as seen and felt by those caught up personally in the process.

The extent to which this sort of material can be used for educational purposes should not be overlooked. Not only can it be used as material for adult education amongst working-class communities but also as project exercises for schoolchildren and students. Local Radio can provide the bodies responsible for adult education with one of the most effective and economical means of extending the benefits of adult education to the larger mass of the population.

We have seen that in the Liverpool E.P.A. situation (and in

similar areas throughout the country) tutors working in the field require special aids. The sort of material and educational 'hardware' associated with traditional curriculum development projects depend to a large extent on an institutional setting with all that entails. In the vastly different informal situations common to working-class adult education, from pub to community centre, a simple effective aid is essential. Local Radio and the use of tapes match the need admirably.

BBC Local Radio can provide an extremely valuable educational service in its own right and at the same time provide the 'workshop' for other material for use with working-class communities. It thus can become truly a 'community' radio service, particularly for those in most need of education and of a communications outlet for their frustrations.

As the social services, education, and local government become increasingly community-minded, local radio has an increasingly important role to play in developing links between these services and the community by:

(*a*) providing effective information on these services in a language that the ordinary layman can understand. The mass media has much more relevant experience in this sort of work than many of the officials concerned with social, educational and economic administration in the community. This experience can effectively support those working in these fields.

(*b*) using local radio as a vehicle for the expression of opinions by the various community groups in our large cities, as well as providing information on their activities and on the varying responses to their efforts. Our experience in Liverpool showed the desire amongst many residents to know more about the activities of other residents' groups and their dealings with the local authority.

(*c*) extending the more formal educational service for adults in ways detailed in this booklet.

The *Living Today* series was carried out with a very small budget. Its achievement owed much to the time and effort given by BBC Radio Merseyside even though it placed daunting demands upon existing resources. It was not designed as a piece of pure educational research but as an action/research project. However, the experiment did illustrate that it is possible to engage working-class communities in adult education given the right format. If we are to build upon the results of this experiment, then financial assistance is

necessary to explore more fully the potential displayed. In other sectors of education large sums of money are spent on research and development. Adult education, however, is financially very much on the periphery of the educational world. Little or no money has been made available for research and action. This work in the E.P.A. points out the real needs amongst that large section of the population who have benefited least from their educational experience.

The breakdown in established communities; the change taking place in so many of our institutions; the climate of moral upheaval; the gap between bureaucracy in all its forms and the people; all these provide adult education with a great opportunity to demonstrate its effective and vital role in the educational system. That role is both remedial and supportive. It is remedial in helping to rectify the defects of the formal educational system. It is supportive to communities tackling problems for which their education has left them inadequately equipped.

Much has been said of the importance of adult education in providing for the increased leisure time of an advanced technological society. Such determinations do not even touch on the real need, for they ignore yet again the current, pressing needs of those who, impressed with the 'failure' of their youth, and lacking opportunity and support in later life are impeded in their personal lives by what are so frequently spurious feelings of inferiority.

The need is for finance to provide these adults – over 50 per cent of the population according to the Newsom Report – with the sort of educational material that is most likely to succeed in eradicating these attitudes and in assisting them with dignity to take a stabilised place in the community. This account of our experiment suggests that further work of this sort would be very well worth while.

The Workers' Educational Association with its network of tutors and branches throughout the country is anxious to expand work in this field. However, extensive support is a prerequisite to an enlargement of its work amongst working-class communities. Traditional adult teaching material and methods are in many instances neither relevant nor appropriate. An extension of the partnership with BBC Local Radio together with a more detailed development project to provide teaching material, and undertake new forms of in-service training would, we are convinced, open the way for a major advance in adult education and community participation in community affairs.

Published by the British Broadcasting Corporation, 35 Marylebone High Street, London W1M 4AA, and printed in England by The Broadwater Press Ltd, Welwyn Garden City, Herts. ISBN: 0 563 12345 1